

Arabic and Islamic Drama, a Medium for Conflict Management in Nigeria: A Study of Z. I. Osen's *Attabaqatul Al-Ulyah* (The Upper Class)

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Abstract

Drama right from its beginning has been used in analyzing and reshaping the socio-political, socio-cultural, religious and economic structure of all societies in the world. African playwrights have used drama as a medium of educating and managing environmental conflicts. There is almost no society today that is free from conflicts and environmental crises. The present predicament of Nigeria is as a result of so many conflicts and crises between the citizens such as: religious conflict, political conflict, tribal conflict, regional conflict and cultural conflict and environment crises. Conflicts and Crises has so many negative effects to the society such as: disunity, lack of development and economic setback. Hence the need for enlighten and educating the citizens on how to manage conflict and crises becomes necessary. Various methods can be used in doing this and drama is one of the methods, this paper therefore analyses one of Osen's play text *Attabaqatul Al-Ulyah* (The Upper Class) in order to draw out some valuable lessons and methods of conflicts and crises management for peaceful environment. The researchers adopts the content analysis of qualitative research method. The research findings shows that for the peaceful co-existence of any society,

there is need for conflict management through various means. The playwright therefore asserts the role of the clergy men, individual and government in conflict and crises management. The study recommends that more plays should be written by Arabic and Islamic Scholars to educate and promote peace and security. The paper therefore, concludes that Arabo-Islamic drama is a vital means for the propagation of peace and conflict management.

Key words: Arabic Drama; Conflict; Management; Crises

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict and Crisis occurs between people in all kinds of human relationships and in all social setting. Conflict and Crisis are natural as far as human being is concern. According to Deutsch and Coleman:

Conflict occurs between people in all kinds of human relationships and in all social settings. Because of the wide range of potential differences among people; the absence of conflict usually signals the absence of meaningful interaction. Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. However, the manner in which conflict is handled determines whether it is constructive or destructive. (2000)

This shows that conflict and crisis are inevitable aspects of human interaction. The United State Institute of Peace assert that: "Conflict is present when two or more individuals or groups pursue mutually incompatible goals. Conflict can be waged violently, as in a war, or nonviolently, as in an election or an adversarial legal

process.” However conflict in most cases leads to crisis, many scholars have tried to distinguish conflict from crisis. Crisis is the result of the absence of early warning and early action during the initial period of an escalating conflict. Crisis by its nature may often be a short-term, while conflict can be much longer. Conflict passes through various stages and if not managed or handled with proper care can lead to crisis in which aftermath results is always war or other forms of insecurities.

Conflicts have a definite tendency to escalate, i.e, to become seriously intense and hostile, and as well to develop more issues and insecurities in the society. So, if a conflict is not managed or handled with care and just, then it becomes more difficult to manage, and the process of this escalation feeds on fear and defensiveness.

From the above assertions, it is very clear that disagreement is inevitable but the most important thing is how the situation can be handled to avoid escalating into crisis. It is on this note that the researcher studies the play *Al-Tabaqat Al-Ulya* (The Upper Class) in order to see how the playwright explores the potential of drama in conflict and crisis management. The playwright displays the roles of religious leaders, government, and individual members of the society. The playwright also teaches that, with justice, fairness, equity and level playing ground for the two or more people who are contesting for power as well allowing the masses to elect their choice of leader without any form of intimidations is a very good way of managing conflict and crisis.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT:

There are different causes of conflicts such as: Information Conflict, Value Conflict, Interest Conflict, Relationship Conflict, and Structural Conflict. According to Ron Fisher: “One of the early theorists on conflict, Daniel Kartz (1965), created a typology that distinguishes three main sources of conflict: economic, value, and power.” (1)

1. Economic conflict involves competing motives to attain scarce resources. Each party wants to get the most that it can, and the behavior and emotions of each party are directed toward maximizing its gain.

2. Value conflict involves incompatibility in ways of life, ideologies – the preferences, principles and practices that people believe in. International conflict (e.g. the Cold War) often has a strong value component, wherein each side asserts the rightness and superiority of its way of life and its political-economic system.

3. Power conflict occurs when each party wishes to maintain or maximize the amount of influence that it exerts in the relationship and the social setting. It is impossible for one party to be stronger without the other being weaker, at least in terms of direct influence over

each other. Power conflicts can occur between individuals, between groups or between nations, whenever one or both parties choose to take a power approach to the relationship. Power also enters into all conflicts since the parties are attempting to control each other.

METHODS OF CONFLICTS MANAGEMENT

No matter the level of conflicts, there are different ways or approaches to deal with the incompatibilities that exist. Conflict can result in destructive outcomes or creative ones depending on the approach that is taken and the way it is been managed. Blake, Shepard and Mouton said that: “Three general strategies have been identified that the parties may take towards dealing with their conflict; win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win.” (4)

- The **win-lose approach** is all too common. This strategy is thus to force the other side to capitulate. Sometimes, this is done through socially acceptable mechanisms such as majority vote, the authority of the leader, or the determination of a judge. Sometimes, it involves secret strategies, threat, innuendo-whatever works is acceptable, i.e., the ends justify the means.

- The **lose-lose strategy** is exemplified by smoothing over conflict or by reaching the simplest of compromises. In either case is the creative potential of productive conflict resolution realized or explored. Disagreement is seen as inevitable, so therefore why not split the difference or smooth over difficulties in as painless a way as possible? Sometimes, this is indeed the reality of the situation, and the cost are less than in the win-lose approach, at least for the loser. Each party gets some of what it wants, and resigns itself to partial satisfaction. Neither side is aware that by confronting the conflict fully and cooperatively they might have created a more satisfying solution. Or the parties may realistically use this approach to divide limited resources or to forestall a win-lose escalation and outcome.

- The **win-win** approach is a conscious and systematic attempt to maximize the goals of both parties through collaborative problem solving. The conflict is seen as a problem to be solved rather than a war to be won. The important distinction is we (both parties) versus the problem, rather than we (one party) versus them (the other party). This method focuses on the needs and constraints of both parties rather than emphasizing strategies designed to conquer.

Muhammad Sani Isa asserts that: “While conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional, failure to prevent and manage conflict, or failure to transform conflict for peace-building purposes can move conflict to the level of crisis.” (26)

FACTS AND EFFECTS OF CRISIS

If conflicts are not well managed and resolved especially political, marital and land issues, it leads to crisis and crisis usually leads to lose of lives and properties. Each time we watch television, listen to the radio or read the newspapers or on the social media, there is always news about crises such as: road accidents, fire outbreaks, explosions, food poisoning, terrorists' attacks, etc. The following are some of the effects of crisis:

1. Crisis creates an unstable condition as in political, social or economic affairs involving an impending abrupt or decisive change.

2. It is an emotionally stressful event or traumatic change in a person's life.

3. Crisis are conceived, planned, instigated, financed and promoted through the youths who have nothing practical to gain from them.

4. Crisis is no respecter of anybody, organizations or societies. It creates injuries, illnesses, deaths, property damage and other undesirable consequences.

5. Crisis transcends borders and tribes, separates families, hinders high-priority goals and threatens our growth, development and communal survival.

6. Crisis is usually sudden and unwanted. When it starts, it normally interrupts the normal operations of the people, organizations and societies.

Based on the above stated effects of crisis, it is therefore compulsory on us to try as much as possible to avoid crisis through conflict management. Each of us has a role to play and decision to make with specific operational ownership in crisis detection, prevention and management processes.

DRAMA AND CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Drama has been widely acclaimed as a positive medium for mirroring society, it is a representation of life. While drama entertains it also teaches and informs. The playwright through his play inform and teaches his society on a particular issues. According to Nnanake Ekeke:

It must be noted that the playwright does not exist in a vacuum; he is the product of sociological, cultural, and environmental factors. It is pertinent to observe that the content of a playwright's dramatic outputs are intended to educate, inform, correct, reprimand, entertain and promote the society and its idea. With the aforementioned attributes in his work, he becomes a mouthpiece, critic, advocate, redeemer, revolutionary and promoter of social consciousness in any society from where he operates. (148)

Drama has a great role to play in mediating and resolving societal issues. The place of drama in the society is very paramount. The playwright does not exist in a vacuum, he write for the society informing them of things going on in the society and sometimes educate them on

how to go about in solving some issues. Nnanake further said that: "The place of the playwright in the society is paramount. He acts as commentator on, and communicator of events, be it religious, economic, political, educational or social. His dramatic writings and expressed views are not restricted to time and space but they reflect the minds of his people and explore ways molding a critically conscious society." (148) Bamidele. L.O. also asserts that:

Our study of literature reveals that it is also a discipline pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it and desire to change it. The literacy forms in prose, poem or play attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the state in its economic or religious constructs. Literature delineates the role of man in his environment, as well as the conflicts and tension between groups and social classes. In other words it deals with much of the same social, economic, religious and political textures and structures of the society as it is done in sociology. (4-5)

Playwrights in Nigeria has done well in educating, informing, criticizing and correcting the society through their plays. And the Nigerian Arabo-Islamic playwrights are not relenting in using drama as a way of educating, informing, redirecting and proffering solutions to the society on matters of conflict and crisis. One of the Nigerian Arabic playwrights who has done well in this direction is Zekeriyau Oseni's and one his plays is *Al-Tabaqat Al-Ulya* which is our focus of study in this paper.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY AL-TABAQAT AL-ULYA (THE UPPER CLASS)

It is a four act play written in Arabic language. It involves events at Funore, an imaginary city in Nigeria, sequel to the death of its traditional ruler. The need appoint a new king arise and there were three candidates contesting for the position- Prince Abdul Muqsit Finafina, Prince Abdul Sabur Oshioke and Prince Abdul Hakim Udu. This struggle of who becomes the next king generated into conflicts that nearly becomes a very big crisis.

In the struggle for the throne, many elite associations and prominent individuals played various roles both negative and positive in the determination of the person who will become the king. The most active group among them is the league of '*Ulamau and Imams* (Islamic Scholars) prominent figure among them who played a very vital role in making sure the right thing is done is Sheik Abdul-Muizz Gomina, the Deputy Chief Imam, a courageous, forthright, and kind scholar. He is the hero of the struggle for truth, justice and fair play.

The conflict became tensed as threat of lives were involved and the state government has to intervene. In the end, the government toed the line of Sheik Abdul-Muizz and based on the report of a commission of enquiry it set up. Prince Finafina was arrested for his atrocities at home and abroad and consequently lost the throne to Prince Udu

who was unanimously elected for the throne by the three senior chiefs of Funore town. The third candidate Prince Oshioke withdrew from the race before the election. The coronation ceremony at the palace marks the end of the play.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

It has been a culture in most part of Nigeria that when a king dies the struggle to bring in another new king is always a conflict which sometimes even leads to a very big crisis. In this play, the playwright educates and informs the readers on this kind of happening in our contemporary society using an imaginary town and characters. The conflict started immediately after the death of king AbdulAziz son of Okakwu. It is a normal thing that when someone dies, people will be going to the decease house to pay the family condolence visit and pray for the dead person and the family. Mallam Abdul-Muizz went to pay prince Abdul-Muqsit Fanafana condolence visit and that is where the conflict started.

Mallam Abdul-Muizz: I came to pay you a condolence visit on the death of your uncle who passed away, king AbdulAziz son of Ojakwu. May the mercy of Allah be upon his soul and may he be pardoned by Allah and admit him into His paradise. Amen.

As part of Islamic culture when someone dies, the Muslims visit the families to condole and pray for them and their dead person and that is what Mallam Abdul-Muiz deed as we can see. It is also part of it that they should be given admonition. But Prince Fanafana refused to listen to the admonition.

Mallam Abdul-Muiz: In this kind of situation it is necessary for the scholars to admonish the people on the vanity of this world and the immortality of the hereafter so that people with insight can reflect.

Fanafana: Thanks, thanks, I believe in Allah and I worships Him. I also seek from him all good things that are due for me. There is no time for me right now to listen to your admonition. Indeed you have prayed for the dead but you didn't pray for the living.

Mallam Abdul-Muiz: Thank you prince, may Allah continue to protect you and reward you for all the good works you have done.

The above conversation shows how desperate prince Fanafana wants to become the next king but forget that he needs the endorsement of those that matters. But he has demonstrated a bad intention before Mallam Abdul-Muiz who is one of those who can speak and people will listen and obey because of his uprightness and firmness. Imagine the prince saying he don't have time to listen to his admonition. Well, in every society there are sycophants and undesirable elements who are only concern about their own interest and not the interest of the masses or the community they represents. Some groups of

men who called themselves: "Workers Association" came in during this conversation between the scholar and the prince to congratulate him but not to condole him and as well to promise him their support.

Fodibaba: (getting up with a smile on his face) indeed the Association Workers in this town sent me and my colleagues to you to congratulate you on this golden occasion bestowed on you to assume the throne of your great grandfathers. We know you very well and we are aware that you are going to be the best king of this blessed town. Who don't know you when you are the administrator in the Local government, you gave us the opportunity to eat and drink! We ate to our satisfaction and we drank until we are intoxicated! Who will forget when you in are in office at the state capital? Whoever travels to the state capital from this town goes to your house and you feed them well. What about people that gathers in your house whenever you visit this town? They are all praying for your success always because they ate your foods and drank your drinks which no one has done like that in the whole Africa. Surely, we are aware that this kingdom is already in your hand and Allah is the one who has given it to you. We are very eager to partake in all the process that will bring you to the throne in a very possible short period and that is why the Association sent us to bring you this gift. And we shall contribute financially in a big way to the coronation ceremony. (A very big envelop that contain the gift was handed over to prince Fanafana).

Fanafana: Thanks. May Allah bless you people. Am very optimistic that the people of this my town appreciates whoever that does good deeds to them. I therefore pray to Allah to make the coronation ceremony possible for us as soon possible as we wish.

Mallam Abdul-Muiz: Allah is the giver of kingship and He gives kingship to whoever He wishes.

Fanafana: Ya sheik, you can see what workers association of this town deed. This is what is expected from every sane person in the town of Funore.

Mallam Abdul-Muiz: (gets provoke but conceals his annoyance) may Allah bless the members and guide them to the right path.

When we look at the above conversation critically we can understand that the conflict between Prince Fanafana and Mallam Abdul-muiz has already started. The scholar came for condolence but the prince is not interested in condolence visit but congratulation visit to the extent that he used some insulted words on the scholar but the scholar was able to manage the conflict without quarrel or fight.

In Africa especially in Nigeria, if a King dies, to appoint a new king who will succeed the throne is always a big problem. In some cases there are lay down process to appoint a new king but people will still want to truncate the process which always leads to conflict and crisis. Some undesirable elements who call themselves

members of the upper class will want to bring in their own candidate against the will of the people. In this situation the prince has already seen the scholar as an obstacle but still believed he can help him to succeed, he therefore sent some delegates to him to solicit for his help. The delegates went with some amount of money but was rejected by the scholar. This can be seen in chapter two scene one.

Fodibaba: (leader of the delegates) indeed we are sent to you with this envelope. (He brings out an envelope from his pocket containing the sum of twenty thousand naira)

Mallam Abdul-Muiz: what is the content of the envelope?

Fodibaba: A gift of money for you and you students.

Mallam Abdul-Muiz: we don't need that. I have already told you that I shall think over the issue, and that should be enough for you.

Fodibaba: in all case, we are asking you to pardon us and the prince.....

As a man who is very firm and steadfast, Mallam Abdul-Muiz rejected their offer of gift and told them that he is going to think over their request to support the prince. He neither tell them he will support him nor will be against him but he is not really supporting him. This is one method of managing conflict. The problem continue to increase as the three contestants are having their supporters. Prince Fanafana who is too eager to assume the throne is using his money to lobby the people to support him and as well threatening the other contestants. Those contesting for the throne are three in numbers: Prince Abdulmuqsit Fanafana, Prince Abdulsabur Oshioke who is a younger brother to Prince Fanafana and Prince Abdulhakeem Uduh who is from a different lineage. Prince Fanafana who asked his brother to step down for him but the brother refused and was threatened to live the town if not will be dealt with. He later left the town to go and stay in Kano state. Prince Abdulhakeem had a very serious conflict with Prince Fanafana which also made to live the country to go and stay Italy where he does business.

When the crisis was becoming serious the state government has to come in through the Ministry of chieftaincy affairs in order to manage the conflict and crisis before it will escalate. Conflict have a definite tendency to escalate, i.e, to become more intense and hostile, and to develop more issues. Therefore, escalating conflicts become more difficult to manage and the process of escalation feeds on fear and defensiveness. In that case the government set up a committee of enquiry to visit the community and have a meeting with stake holders. The committee is headed by a director from the ministry. At the meeting ground so many things were said about the contestants and the conflict and crisis involve which gave the committee an insight to the whole matter and pave way for them to manage the conflict and crisis.

After the introduction of the committee members and the stakeholders, the director's explained to the stakeholders why they were in the community after which he asked individuals to explain what they know about the issue. Among those who spoke at the meeting are:

Alhaji Okolo: Thanks so much for coming to solve our problem. Indeed, we the leaders of the three clans in this town have come together and agreed that we shall do our best to prevent crisis and enmity in this town. Initially, the contestants were three, they are prince Abdulmuqsit fanafana and his younger brother prince Abdulsabur Ashoke and Prince Abdulhakeem Uduh and they are all qualified for the position except that prince Fanafana forced his younger brother to step down for him after much resistance who is currently staying in Kano state. The third prince is a very good, calm and humble person but there was a very serious conflict between him and prince Fanafana which forced him out of the town. It was said that he is now in Italy where he is doing business. The only contestant left now is prince Fanafana people love and at the same time they are afraid of him. This is the summary of the happenings in the town.

That was the summary of the situation report given by the head of the clans, though other leaders of the various groups were also given the chance to give their reports. Among them are: Dr Umudidi chairman Funere community development, Mr Agadagidi Chairman Farmers Association, Mr Fodibaba Chairman Workers Association, and Mallam AbdulMuiz who represented the league of Imams and Scholars. They all spoke well giving vivid explanations without bias and open support for any of the contestant except Mr Fodibaba the chairman of the workers union. But the speech and presentation of Mallam Abdulmuiz revealed the atrocities of prince Fanafana. How the government decided to handle the situation with carefulness so that the conflicts will not escalate to crisis and war. The leader of the government delegation Mr. Isebu gave his remarks as follows:

Mr. Isebu: I wish to inform you that the government is going to pile up your all these your reports, study them critically with a very humble spirit and then we shall return back with the judgment. The government will not do injustice to anybody, so be rest assured that we are not going to tell lies against anybody in this matter.

CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE PLAY

It must be noted that most conflicts are not of a pure type, but involve a mixture of sources, however the source of conflict in this play is majorly on power struggle. It is very significant that a final source of conflict is more additional than basic, that is, it comes in after the conflict has started. Conflicts have a definite tendency to escalate, i.e. to become more intense and hostile, and to develop more issues.

The government actually did not take side in managing the conflict. The report was submitted to the Commissioner for chieftaincy affairs who studied it and as well briefed the state governor. In our societies and communities today we are facing so many crisis and wars which has resulted to loss of lives and properties due to power tussles. Those with money and political power will fight for the throne that they know very well that it doesn't belong to them or their clan and government who is supposed to manage the conflict and crisis will rather complicate the issue by supporting the unrightfully person simply because he is a member of their political party or because he has somebody in the government. But in this case the conflict is well managed and justice was done.

The following steps were taken to resolve the crisis and as well choose the most qualified person for the throne:

1. Prince Fanafana was invited to a meeting by the commissioner for chieftaincy affairs and security agents were presents in the meeting. In the meeting he was seriously warned not to cause any trouble or threaten anybody.

2. The government then sent messages to the other two contestants to return home and contest for the throne.

3. All the various groups in the community political, social, economic and religious groups were invited to a town hall meeting by the state government. In the meeting all the representatives of the groups presented their speeches and copies of their speeches were also given to the committee for further studies. The meeting revealed so many things about the contestants and their actions in the race.

4. The government after hearing from the masses and the contestants put their report together and the outcome of the meeting reveals the atrocities of prince fanafana within and outside the community.

5. At the end, election was conducted between Prince fanafana and Prince Abdulhakim Udu right in the present of the governor and the result of the election favored Prince Abdulhakim Udu. The governor the quickly fixed a date for the coronation of the new king.

6. On the fixed day of the coronation, it was a very memorable event which was attended by personalities within and outside the community. The staff of office was given to the new King.

There are differing approaches to deal with issues. Conflict can result in destructive outcomes or creative ones depending on the approach that is taken. In this play the playwright made us to understand that the win-lose approach was adopted by the government in order to manage the conflict and bring peace back to the community. People were asked to vote for their choice which ended with majority votes and through that they were able to have their new King which ended the conflict and crisis.

CONCLUSION

Thus far we have attempted an analysis of the play *Attabaqatul Al-Ulyah* (The Upper Class) to show how drama is used as a tool for social-political commentary and have been able to establish the fact that Playwrights uses their works to show ill inherent in their society. Therefore, from this study of *Attabaqatul Al-Ulyah* (The Upper Class), it has become obvious that Arabic and Islamic playwrights also can employ literary drama as an effective tool for social commentary and as well educate the masses and government on conflict and crisis management.

The research findings shows that for the peaceful co-existence of any society, there is need for conflict management through various means. The playwright also asserts that the role of the clergy men, individual and government in conflict and crisis management is very important. It is a collective responsibility and people must be ready to be firm and steadfast in advocating for truth, justice, transparency because the absence of justice, transparency and truthfulness can easily bring conflict and crisis to the society just as we can see in the play. The playwright also revealed through the play on the reality of power tussles in the Nigerian societies and how people goes extremely dangerous when contesting for positions.

In this play Mallam AbdulMuiz acted the role of a religious scholar who is upright in his doing. He is courageous, firm and truthful and that is how men of God supposed to be in so the society. But it is very unfortunate that many of our scholars today are after worldly things such as money and that has led them to stand against truth. In this play the corrupt and undesirable prince fanafana who want to become the king by all means tried several times to bribe the scholar with very huge amount of money in order to support him but he refused. He also sent his wife to him with money but yet he declined and this why he was able to speak the truth in presence of the government and his own report was the major convincing report that gave the government real clue about the situation and personality of individual contestants.

The play and it characters may be imaginative but critical survey and reflection on our society will show you that the story is a reflection of the society. The playwright aims at educating and informing his readers on how things happens in our society and how we can handle the situation in order to bring peace, harmony and tranquility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research will not be complete without the researchers making some recommendations. The following recommendations are therefore given in order to motivate

and arouse the interest of the Muslim scholars and the literary writers in exploring the potentials of drama for social commentary. The researchers therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. We should try as much as possible to always manage conflict and crisis before it will escalate into war, unrest and insecurity.

2. Leaders should be firm, just and steadfast in the decision of leadership in our society.

3. Muslim scholars should adopt the use of drama and theatre in promoting peace and security.

4. Arabic and Islamic playwrights should not relent their efforts in educating the masses through their creative writings.

5. The study of theatre, drama and film by the Muslims should be seriously encouraged and not to be discouraged.

6. Muslims actors should try to translate and stage plays of the Nigerian Arabic and Islamic scholars so that people can benefits from the messages and education.

7. The Departments of Arabic and Islamic studies in our Universities should give importance to practical and theoretical studies of drama, theatre and film making because it can serves as means of teaching and learning of the religion.

8. At every occasions and programs brief drama should be staged in Arabic and English languages.

9. Arabic and Islamic playwrights should try to borrow more skills of playwriting from their colleagues in the departments of English and literary studies and as well theatre and film studies so that their plays can be of quality and withstand international standard.

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